

Contributions

HOW READEST THOU?

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In the Twentieth Century number of the BRETHREN EVANGELIST, Brother Gnagey, ye editor, asks me to "preach a sermon" for the benefit of the readers of the paper on the subject of the caption of this article in its reference to the backward, downward tendency of the times. In terse phrase is optimism or pessimism the prevailing tendency?

The readers of the BRETHREN EVANGELIST will remember that in my article on "The Going and Coming Century," I assumed the role of the pessimist. Brother Gnagey noted that fact and observed that the grand old book of God was optimistic all thru, and he thinks the tendency of the times is likewise. The old saying that "circumstances alter cases" is apropos to the question in controversy. For instance, an ex-president of the United States who went into that exalted station with a probable fifty thousand to his credit, and out of it with a good many millions, wrote that "life was one grand, sweet song." He was enthusiastically optimistic. I think the Standard Oil stockholders, the Rockefellers, with dividends amounting to \$40,000,000 a year are in an optimistic frame most of the time. The trust brigands evidently are not afflicted with the pessimistic ague, having unlimited power, guaranteed by the government, to tax the people to the utmost limit of endurance. So persons favored by the smiles of the world are not usually inclined to grope in the dim, murky atmosphere of pessimism. The halo of worldly prosperity, illusory as it is, unfits men for the encounter of the facts of destiny and revelation. But we look elsewhere for the data to settle the question at issue, and others decide the direction of the tides, besides the recipients of the world's favors, or the victims of its powers.

We will estimate the trend of current events. Is the world growing better, taking the ethics of the Bible and loyalty to God as our standard and guide.

First, I affirm that there is less faith in God existent in the world today than at any period heretofore. According to a specific statement of Christ, "When I come again shall I find faith on earth?" the last stage of existence in this dispensation will be "a faithless stage." This declaration justifies the conclusion that with the lapse of faith retrogression is the inevitable consequence. Look at some of the evidences of this retrogression:

1. There is more drunkenness in the world today than ever before. Most of the governments of the world procure more revenue from its drunkards than from any other single source. They are in open, active league with this most damning evil, and more appalling still, this condition could not prevail were it not for the active endorse-

ment of nineteen-twentieths of the people who claim to be the children of God.

2. There is less humanity or brotherly love in the world today than at any prior period. The two great professing Christian nations, the only great nations that have a free Bible, are now prosecuting wars of extermination, one against a weak, alien race, the other against a kindred Christian people, and these wars are confessedly cold blooded, money getting wars. To make the arraignment more terrific, there are hundreds of men in these wars professed ministers of God, who lend the sanction of their holy office and the consolations of our religion to those bloody murderers, and the masses of worshippers at home approve the work. It is impossible to conceive or portray the barbarities perpetrated in these wars, and it is all done in the glare of the light of the last days which marks a lower depth of depravity than has ever been attained since history began.

I do not compare these wars with those that were fought in mediaeval times, which were fought for self-preservation. A vast difference prevails between the acts of men who slay to protect life and those who kill to despoil peaceful people of their possessions.

3. There is more selfishness in the world today than ever before. This evil trait is the embodiment of all that is satanic, the very antipode of the Spirit of Christ. All the business of the world is prosecuted on the narrowest lines of personal interest. The apostolic injunction that "we should not seek our own but another's wealth," I Cor. 10:24, had as well been addressed to the mythical man in the moon as to the people of this world, judging from its influence in the management of their affairs. How much of that charity that "seeketh not her own" exists among church members, think you Brother Gnagey? The selfish man's prayer that the "Lord bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife," predominates in the practice of the multitudes.

4. There is less purity in the world today than ever before. The divorce courts illustrate the laxity of modern morals as they relate to the sacred marriage relation. The number of people who regard that relation as a civil instead of a religious one, to be abandoned at the will of the contracting parties is increasing alarmingly. Promiscuity is practiced among so-called Protestant people to an extent appalling to a lover of the Lord, and their soiled skirts as white as milk in comparison with Catholic and heathen nations. Unchastity is the leading, predominating, absorbing, damning sin of this age and it is a sure precursor of certain and speedy dissolution. The history of all the nations dead attests the fact that indiscriminate sexual indulgence always preceded destruction.

These are not careless speculations but incontestible facts attested by current history that is patent to the most superficial, and they support my contention that the trend of the present age is from God.

But, replies the optimist, does not the spread of the gospel and its acceptance by heathen nations justify the belief that the dominion of satan will soon be subverted?

The divine intention, to be subverted by missions, is not to convert the heathen but "as a testimony against them," "and then will the end come."

At the present rate of progress of missions in less, probably, than half of the present century, this prophesy will be fulfilled and then will the Master come.

With the complete domination of the four great evils, inhumanity, drunkenness, selfishness and unchastity in the hearts and lives of the people I note little to inspire the optimist or allay the fears of the pessimist.

Brother Gnagey says it is easy to trace optimism in the prophets and apostles. Let us note a few references to those historians.

Noah preached the destruction of the world for 120 years. One of the most persistent and longest attacks of pessimism on record. It would be interesting to know what the optimists of that day thought and said about the old pessimistic ark builder.

Lot and Abram were pronounced pessimists in the estimation of the Sodomites on the evening of the angelic visitation.

Jonah performed that unpopular role when he told his ominous message to Nineveh. Daniel did the same when he read the fateful writing on the walls of drunken Belshazzar's palace.

The sad Lamentations of the sorrowful prophet Jeremiah are an eternal testimony against the optimism that fails to see the hand of God against the prevailing sins of the ages.

Passing on to the last of the ages, we note the voice of God's incarnate Son in kindred testimony on the subject of divine wrath revealed against the world, *out of which*, he came to redeem a chosen few.

"I came not to bring peace but a sword" was one of his first proclamations as to the object of his mission. All along this ministry he emphasized the doctrine that sin would destroy this world in the fullness of time. Inspired by that teaching, St. Peter, who heard every discourse that his Master delivered, repeated the prophesy in most appalling terms saying, "This world that was once destroyed by a flood is reserved unto fire for the perdition of ungodly men."

There is no variant testimony in the blessed old Book, as to the ultimate fate of the physical world. Destruction by fire is its awful doom, and the sum of all these fearful prophesies is found in the passages which compare this age with that which ushered in the flood of Noah and the fire of Sodom: "As it was in the days of Noah and Sodom so shall it be in the day of the coming of the Son of Man."

The optimism of the Bible refers to a regenerated, purified earth, by the process of fire. Its brightest pages glow with matchless radiance in description of that blessed